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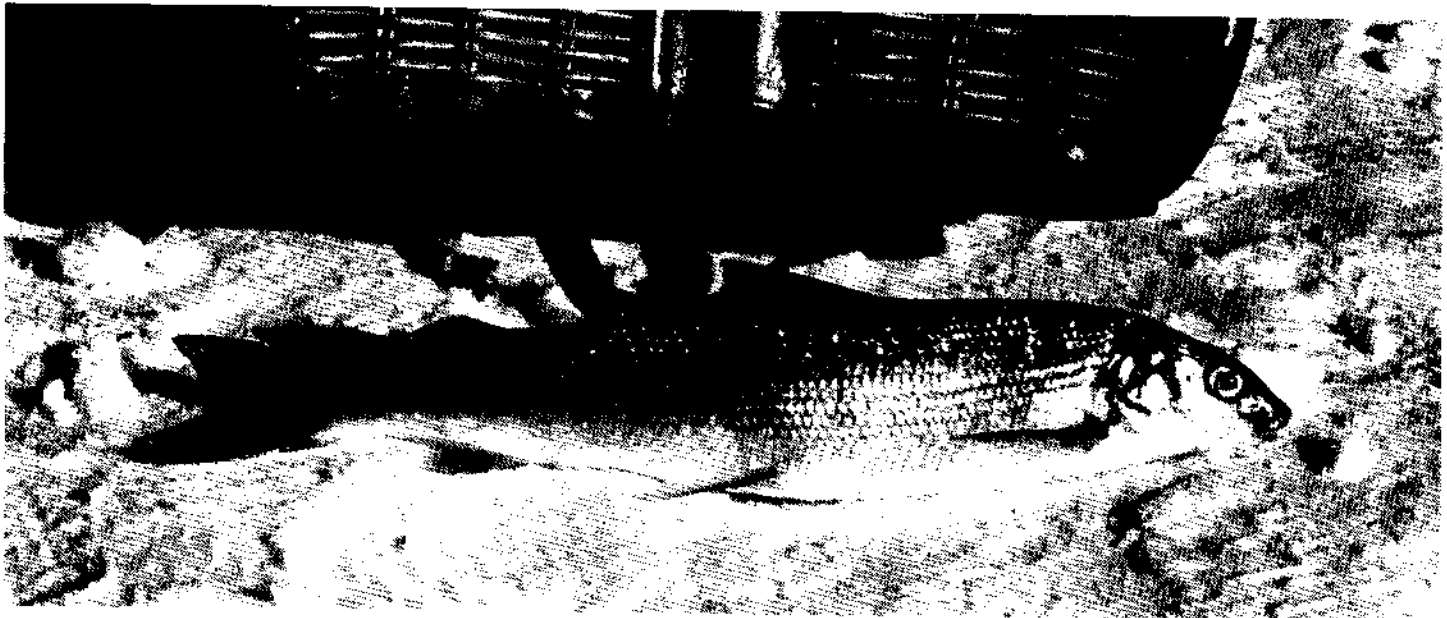
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Don't ignore the whitefish

by
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The angler typically sees his first whitefish when he is fishing for trout or steelhead and a whitefish shows up as part of his incidental catch. It may puzzle the angler, who may, at first, mistake it for a sucker or a chub because of the fish's small, unusual mouth structure.

But the whitefish is easily identified: It has a silvery appearance, a small terminal mouth, soft-rayed fins and an adipose fin that clearly distinguishes it from suckers and chubs. Trout and salmon have adipose fins, too, but the whitefish has larger scales than either of these.

The mountain whitefish (*Prosopium williamsoni*) is one of two species of whitefish taken by anglers in Washington. It is native to Washington waters and is found in most major river systems in both eastern and western

Washington and occasionally in lakes. Another species, the lake whitefish (*Coregonus clupeaformis*), occurs in fishable numbers in Banks and Roosevelt Lakes and in other Columbia Basin waters.

Game department biologists see large numbers of whitefish in many Washington streams, which implies that anglers may be overlooking a fine potential resource. These fish are an excellent sport fish; they take a variety of lures and baits, including small artificial flies. The best angling for whitefish takes place during the fall and winter.

In the sport catch, whitefish average 11 to 12 inches long and weigh one-half to three-quarters of a pound. Whitefish are excellent smoked, and many fishermen catch whitefish with smoking in mind. They are also very good when they are prepared fresh and taste much like trout.

Most whitefish mature in their third year of life. Females deposit from 5,000 to 24,000 small eggs in the gravel of stream bottoms. Unlike trout and salmon, whitefish do not dig a "redd," or depression, in which to lay the eggs. The eggs are adhesive and stick to rocks and sand, which anchor them to the bottom. Spawning apparently occurs only at night. The eggs will hatch in 35 to 40 days in 50-degree (Fahrenheit) water; hatching is delayed when water temperatures are lower. Whitefish are not artificially propagated, since most waters contain adequate numbers of this species to sustain a healthy fishery.

The Washington state record for sport-caught mountain whitefish is a three-pound, 13-ounce fish caught in 1975 from the North Fork Stillaguamish River. ◇

The landowner who opens his land to hunting bestows a privilege on the hunter. The hunter, in turn, must prove worthy of the landowner's trust if he hopes to hunt there again next year. Most hunters know this. And because they know it, they go out of their way to repay their hosts' kindness with courtesy. They ask landowners' permission before they hunt on private land, and they respect the land and the owners' possessions.

But as is so often the case, a few bad-mannered hunters can ruin things for everyone. Because of the few who have abused farmers' hospitality, fewer Columbia Basin farmers each year open their land to the public for hunting.

said. "Four-wheel drives can leave tracks that turn into erodable ditches." A farmer whose harvester gets stuck in one of these ditches can be understandably bitter.

To combat this, some farmers post their land against unauthorized vehicles. Most farmers, Galbreath said, would rather have hunters park their vehicles and walk onto their land. A thief can dismantle farm machinery and take it away in a vehicle. Since farmers have no way of telling the responsible hunter from the thief, they worry less when visitors must come onto their land on foot.

In many cases, Galbreath said, farmers fear their crops or livestock

For example, the circular irrigated areas near the banks of the Columbia River produce good goose hunting. Some owners of these lands keep hunting rights for themselves or lease them out. But these farmers use public water to irrigate their crops, and they profit by selling their products to the public. The game department now demands a voice in negotiations for this irrigation water, and new contracts require the landowners to open irrigated areas to public hunting.

In most cases, however, the landowner is free to lease his land at whatever price the market will bear. Leasing also permits him to be more selective about who hunts in his back yard. Is this the

A courteous hunter is a welcome guest

by Jay Stockbridge

One of the farmers' biggest complaints, according to regional game biologist Don Galbreath, is against those who leave garbage and debris on their property. Other complaints include broken fences, open gates and shooting near buildings.

"I've seen the results of this with my own eyes," game department habitat specialist Roger Harkins said. "These are the exceptions, but this kind of thing is growing. The hunter has to recognize the rights of others, or we're going to turn off the public to everything we do."

"On the plus side," he continued, "it's amazing the number of farmers that are extremely tolerant."

Another major complaint by farmers is the abuse of their land by persons in vehicles.

"I can't harp enough on the attitude of people using automobiles," Harkins

may be injured in the rush when the general hunting season opens. So they post "No Hunting" signs. After the crops are harvested, the farmers may not mind the hunters on their land.

"They may leave the signs up," he explained, "but even though the land is marked, hunters may be able to get in with the permission of the farmers."

Harkins, too, urges hunters to ask farmers' permission: "They appreciate the courtesy of asking, and they like to know who is on their land."

A trend toward leased hunting is taking place throughout eastern Washington.

"Farmers are leasing land to those willing to pay a price for hunting," Galbreath said. Where farmers lease their land for hunting, clubs and well-to-do hunters have an obvious financial advantage over the average hunter.

trend of the future? One thing is certain; Hunters and their manners will get close scrutiny by landowners everywhere.

Game department officials agree that courtesy is critical to the future of hunter access on private lands. Hunters do well to get a landholder's permission before hunting on his land, to stay on well defined roads, to park their vehicles and walk into the area they are hunting, to respect the farmer's property, and to pick up their garbage and pack it out with them when they leave. And responsible hunters will help wildlife agents root out hoodlums by reporting wrong-doing wherever they see it.

Many landowners welcome hunters. The wise sportsman will give the landowner no cause to regret that hospitality. ◇

